

## Zuzana Říhová: Year of Metamorphosis

### summary

The author captures the year 1912 in Franz Kafka's life, the year in which he wrote the story "The Metamorphosis."

Nearly all events are viewed through Kafka's eyes, recorded and reflected by his mind. Thus the core of the prose unfolds almost entirely through his perspective, capturing his internal reflections and emotional responses to the events around him. Rather than presenting an objective view, the prose immerses readers in Kafka's sensory experiences, blending external events with his psychological turmoil. Here, feelings and thoughts evolve into events of their own.

The "narrative" begins with Kafka's summer stay at the Jungborn sanatorium. Upon his return to Prague, Franz realizes that, although his physical health has improved due to the sanatorium's natural treatments (which he views ironically), this improvement only temporarily masks the deep-seated anxiety that constantly grips him.

Franz's anxiety is exacerbated by his father's demand that he work in the family factory for several hours following his day job. He perceives the factory through all his senses. Through sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste he not merely captures its atmosphere (and the vitality of its workers), but also conveys the psychological toll it takes on him. The oppressive environment of mechanical labor and its health hazards seep into his mind, amplifying his distress.

Seeking refuge from his stifling reality—an alienating family dynamic that torments him with its noise, a strained relationship with his father, and an obsession with two canaries—Franz turns to bars and the Trokadero brothel. Here, he finds a fleeting sense of freedom, yet this escape fails to inspire his writing, which he sees as essential for his self-fulfillment.

A visit to the Brod family offers a flicker of hope. Though he is supposed to present a manuscript to Max Brod, he arrives with only a few pages—nothing of interest to his publisher in Germany. He meets Felice Bauer, a relative of Max's from Berlin. Although he does not find her beautiful, he falls in love with her. Their relationship blossoms through letters after she returns to Berlin, yet this infatuation yields no creative inspiration; instead, he finds himself writing letters rather than stories. Complications arise when Franz discovers his mother reads Felice's letters before he does and even responds to them.

Franz finds his home life increasingly unbearable. Escaping once more to the brothel, he encounters a prostitute named Berta, and they discuss theosophy. In a surreal turn, he participates in a séance that devolves into farce.

As he wanders through the magical Prague night, Franz grapples with the disappointment of having written nothing once again. Near dawn, he has a dreamlike encounter with animals that have escaped from a private zoo.

Upon returning home, he finally sits at his desk and begins to write, losing track of time as exhaustion and heartache dissipate. When he finishes, a sense of relief washes over him. On the morning of November 17, 1912, he enters his sisters' room, clutching a thick bundle of papers that promise a

departure from the ordinary. As he reads the story aloud, they recognize the familiar setting he describes, cautioning him not to share it with their father.

Thus begins another ordinary morning for the Kafkas, filled with noise, smells, and a palpable sense of futility. One of the canaries dies.